

Janice Williams
Testimony Before Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 24th 2009

My name is Janice Williams, I live in Hartford and work at the Stop and Shop in Windsor. I have been a Stop and Shop employee since 1978 and I am also a member of the Executive Board of UFCW Local 371.

I am here to testify in support of HB 6187, the paid sick days bill.

I want to share my story as an example of the benefits of providing paid sick days. This is a benefit that I have received throughout the years I have worked for Stop and Shop and I know it has been important for myself, for my son.

There have been several occasions when I had a cold or the flu and having paid sick days gave me the piece of mind that I could stay home and recuperate without being penalized with the loss of pay for a few days. Losing a couple of days pay out of my paycheck may not sound like a big deal to some people. But with the cost of living in Connecticut I can tell you that for many hourly workers like myself, losing 20% or 40% of your pay for a week is a big deal. For some people that means they can't make a car payment or rent or utility bills. Because I have paid sick days, getting sick has not caused economic hardship.

More importantly, having sick days has enabled me to ensure that my son can get the medical treatment that he needs. I have a 13-year old son, Dayquan, who has asthma. So in addition to his regular once per year physical, I also take him to the adolescent clinic at Saint Francis hospital for regular check-ups. He gets medications prescribed there and a plan of the steps we take to contain his asthma. Once, I did have to take him to the emergency room to get treatment, but this has only happened one time.

When I need to take Dayquan for his yearly physical or to Saint Francis for treatment for asthma, I can do so without worrying about how I can afford to pay all my bills that month because I lost a day's pay.

Of course, like any other child, Dayqyan also sometimes gets sick with a cold or flu. Having paid sick days means that when he gets sick I can afford to stay home with him for a day or two to take care of him and help him get better. If I did not have paid sick days, I don't really know how I would manage taking care of him without losing the money I need to support him. And by me staying home with him when he does get sick, I don't have to send him to school where he would spread his germs, and he gets better faster. So that's better for everyone.

The moral of this story is this: when it comes to getting healthcare for myself and for my son, I'm the example of doing things the way we're supposed to do them: We both get regular preventive care, we get early treatment for his chronic illness. When we're sick, we stay home just like Governor Rell says on TV. But if I didn't get paid sick days, this just would not be possible. With the cost of everything going up these days, we would have a tough time paying our bills if I had to lose pay every time Dayquan or I got sick or needed to go to the doctor.

I also want to say one other thing. I have heard that some elected officials say that people would abuse sick days if they had them. I think that is very insulting to workers. In my thirty years of working for Stop and Shop I have never abused our sick days policy. I use my sick days for when I'm sick or my son is sick. Period. I get 9 paid sick days per year, and I probably only use about 5

of them on average. Some workers at our store don't use any of them. I know that there might be one or two bad apples at any job, but the vast majority of us care about our job, and work hard. We're not lazy and we don't cut corners and we don't cheat. I don't know anyone at the Stop and Shop where I work who has called out sick when they weren't sick. So please, let's not accuse workers of abuse. It's very insulting.

Thank you for listening to me, and I hope you will pass the sick day bill.